

# Drought and climate adaptation program

## GrazingFutures Case Study

### Weaner nutrition for the win.



Gill and Eunice Campbell run a crossbred cattle and grazing operation across their 13,000-hectare property 'Claravale' situated approximately 50 kilometres northeast of Mitchell, Queensland. In addition to the livestock enterprise, 'Claravale' features a 1,620 hectare nature reserve, which was established in 2000.

'Claravale' has been in the Campbell family since 1890, and environmental sustainability is a priority for Gill and Eunice who are committed to the development of management practices that will improve and maintain the condition of both their land and their livestock. For several years, the Campbell's felt that graziers, themselves included, weren't doing as well as they could at keeping ground cover and pasture quality up to scratch.

This belief, combined with a desire to improve land condition, pasture composition and cattle performance led the Campbells to seek out industry research recommendations and participate in learning opportunities, like Meat & Livestock Australia's (MLA) Grazing Fundamentals and Nutrition EDGE workshops. These workshops, along with the opportunity to host a GrazingFutures funded Efficient Nutrition Workshop (in collaboration with MLA and Mitchell Landcare) at 'Claravale' in 2018, enabled the Campbells to consider alternative management practices for their property and herd.

Their beef enterprise focuses on breeding and selling cross bred weaners. Through attending these EDGE programs and other workshops, they decided to focus on making changes to their weaner feeding management.

Historically, their weaning process involved mustering, drafting and sometimes trucking the weaners back to a central yard on water which could result in up to three days off feed. They would then be educated with dogs and tailed



# Drought and climate adaptation program



out daily to graze pasture over the next one to two weeks. They weren't offered additional feed in the yards overnight.

Through attending the Nutrition EDGE course, they learned the potential three-day feed gap was likely to be eliminating most of the healthy gut bacteria, thus the weaners early rumen biology could be taking up to four weeks to recover, impacting on their growth.

Today, the Campbells avoid this feed-gap by ensuring weaners are given access to ample amounts of quality hay and clean water as soon as the calf leaves the mother, and whenever they are in the yards. Alternating between grass and hay during the week of weaning, allows calves to settle quicker and stay full for longer, maintaining gut health and minimising weight loss. These changes have resulted in significant improvements in

condition and growth of calves post-weaning. This improvement in body weight then carries forward to higher conception and earlier pregnancy rates in the retained heifers.

The value of participating in the GrazingFutures Efficient Nutrition and MLA Nutrition EDGE workshops allowed the family to practically apply new knowledge and further build confidence in drought management decision making. The Campbell's have been members of the Mitchell and District Landcare Association for over twenty years, and their participation in landscape planning and management projects has allowed them to implement numerous improved practices on farm. This has included infrastructure planning and development to support practices which have lifted land condition, such as improved rotational grazing, conservative stocking rates and strategic fire management practices.

A focus on how to best counteract dry seasons, retain a core breeding herd and ultimately grow more, quality 3P (productive, perennial, and palatable) grasses has really highlighted the importance of land management for the Campbell family. The Campbell's decision to rotationally graze ten years ago proved to be a good long-term strategy when it comes to withstanding drought. Running cattle in larger mobs allowed the Campbell's to systematically spell paddocks, improve groundcover and balance cattle and feed supplies. This process was based on the principal of keeping country 'rain ready' and gave grasses a chance to replenish and build more resilience to the impact grazing.



# Drought and climate adaptation program

In turn, the improvement in pasture quality lifted land condition as they have observed a shift in species composition in some areas away from wire grass to more bluegrasses and Mitchell grasses. It also meant they were providing adequate roughage across the property, with year-round use of urea based loose licks, to retain and improve cattle performance over the dry season. Their awareness and use of dung samples for NIRS analysis to determine pasture quality (Gill pictured above learning how to select dung samples from a paddock at the GrazingFutures Efficient Nutrition workshop) has informed supplementation strategies across the year, allowing them to review these strategies based on the prevailing conditions for each paddock, and of each mob. The Campbell's observed that cattle condition was good, even in the peak of the dry spell, with calves retaining fat cover and cows staying in good, strong store condition.

Some rules of thumb for the Campbell's include:

- Actively look for opportunities to improve animal and grazing land management skills and knowledge and always keep learning.
- Equip yourself to progress and improve on-farm practices.
- Use the best knowledge available to make the most out of your land and resources now, and into the future.
- Conservatively stock and actively rotate mobs 2-3 times a year to spell country.
- Continuously monitor the condition of country, in particular keep pastures in good condition and check stocking rates.
- Don't let your stock run out of supplement or fodder when in the yards. Always have hay in the shed and on offer to keep rumen bugs functioning.

**Created by:** Meg Pearce (Cox Inall Communications), Gill and Eunice Campbell ('Claravale') and Rhonda Toms-Morgan (ConnectAg).

**Date:** July, 2021

**Permissions:** External

